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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001219

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [MOPS](#)

SUBJECT: ADEL AND BARHAM OPTIMISTIC OVER BATTLE WITH JAM

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Rob Waller for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In separate April 15 meetings with Special Assistant to the President Brett McGurk, Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh marveled at the new political atmosphere in Baghdad following PM Maliki's offensive in Basrah. Both leaders expressed optimism over what they characterized as a decisive confrontation between the GOI and Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). McGurk emphasized that the U.S. supports Maliki's actions "100 percent" - but the overall strategy must be designed to minimize the fight. Both Barham and Adel said they heard that Muqtada al-Sadr was in Najaf. Barham said that the Iranians were "scared" after the events in Basrah and seeking to restore the status quo in Iraq. Adel said "nothing new" was occurring in Iraq-Iran talks and urged the U.S. to talk to Iran directly. Prior to his meeting with McGurk, Barham was discussing a 10 million USD development plan for an area in the heart of Baghdad. Polmilcouns also attended the meeting with Adel. End Summary.

VP Mehdi: JAM on Defensive, Nothing New With Iran

¶2. (C) Adel was optimistic about the GOI offensive against JAM, crediting an improved political atmosphere to PM Maliki's Charge of the Horseman. "All of us agree Basrah was badly implemented," he said "but the outcome was good." Adel explained that we "may have over-evaluated" the Sadrists, saying that they are strong only when they control the population. He said that JAM was now weakened and expended the "maximum of their power" in Basrah. Sadr now faced a choice between being either a "revolutionary or a peaceful movement, you can't be both" and only by applying continuous "pressure on the security issue" could the GOI compel the Sadrists to make the correct choice. Adel said it was "absolutely false" to see the campaign as a showdown between ISCI/Badr and JAM, saying that the conflict was between the government and those trying to hinder progress. Adel added that the Badr Corps made a decision in 2004 to integrate into the ISF through a legal process, and said a similar option "should be open" to JAM, even though they were founded after the overthrow of Saddam.

¶3. (C) "Your side hesitated," Adel complained, when the GOI decided to prosecute JAM. He said that within the UIA there was confusion over the American position. McGurk explained that in the early stages of Basrah we worried the offensive might reunify JAM Special Groups, JAM writ large, and the larger Sadrist Trend, but emphasized that the U.S. supported Maliki's actions "100 percent." He described the conversation the previous day between the Prime Minister, Ambassador Crocker, and General Petraeus, in which all agreed on coupling a strong and resolute security strategy with a political and economic opening, so as to minimize the group that the Iraqi government, with Coalition support, will need to fight.

14. (C) On Iran, Adel said Iraqi officials were traveling to Iran to receive Iranian reassurances that Tehran would stop supporting violence in Iraq. Asked if the assurances amounted to anything, Adel responded that the "key part" was the U.S.-Iran relationship. Adel suggested that the U.S. address the issue of the Mujahideen el-Khalq (MEK) as a way to improve its relations with Iran. McGurk pointed to the President's April 10 speech, explaining that Iran has a choice to make; and assurances amount to nothing so long as Iran continues to arm, fund, and train illegal groups.

Barham: Support for Maliki, but concerns about Mosul

15. (C) Told that Talabani had characterized the current situation as "spring in Baghdad," Barham laughed and said "or it could be an Indian summer." "The Iranians are scared," said Barham, "they were shocked by Basrah and they are trying to restore the status quo by wooing back Maliki." He sharply criticized the GOI for refusing to take a stand, "even in private," against the Iranians for their role in inciting violence, saying GOI needed to "get off the fence." The bottom line, Barham said, "is who is supplying the weapons?" Barham complimented the recent POTUS speech on Iran, agreeing that Iran faced a clear choice in its policy towards Iraq. "We have an opportunity now to break JAM apart, both militarily and politically, and prevent it from becoming another Hizbollah" said Barham. He acknowledged that the Sadr City operation "could backfire big time" and emphasized the importance of rallying behind PM Maliki. McGurk reiterated U.S. support for the GOI's moves against JAM. Barham added that several Sadristes told him that Sadr had returned to Najaf. Barham said the planned offensive in Mosul was important politically as a demonstration to Shia

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that PM Maliki was also targeting Sunni extremists. However, he said he left "unhappy" from a recent briefing on the operation, worrying that the expected May 1 start date was too early and the GOI risked stretching its forces too thin.

16. (C) Before meeting with American officials, Salah concluded a meeting with the mayor of Baghdad on a 10 billion USD development plan for the Rashid garrison, a large area of the capital adjacent to the International Zone (IZ). The project will include commercial and residential development and be financed through private investment, and Barham planned to call the heads of various companies over the next week to solicit their support. According to the Baghdad mayor, "for the first time people feel comfortable standing up to JAM."

17. (C) Barham said that Tawafuq had submitted a list of ministers to the GOI, mentioning Ali Baban and Rafad Asawi, and added that Khalaf al-Ayan was being nominated for the position of deputy prime minister.
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